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# SCIENCE

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## THE REVIVAL OF ALCHEMY.\*

"Superfluous rehearsalls I lay asyde,  
Intendyng only to give trew informatyon  
Both of the theoryke and practicall  
operatyon;  
That by my wrytyng who so will  
guyded be,  
Of hys intente perfectly speed thall he."  
GEORGE RIPLEY (1471).

FRAUD, folly and failure have been deeply written into the annals of alchemy in all ages; it was early characterized as an 'art without art, beginning with deceit, continued by labor and ending in poverty,' and in modern times its extravagant pretensions have been condemned by an exact and critical science, yet notwithstanding there are to-day indications of a resuscitation of the captivating theories and of renewed attempts at their practical application, of great interest to students of the intellectual vagaries of mankind.

Belief in the possibility of prolonging life by an artificial elixir and of transmuting base metals into silver and gold was generally entertained in the Middle Ages, not only by the ignorant masses, but even by serious-minded philosophers imbued with all the learning of the time; and the popular faith was sustained by the tricks of unprincipled impostors who found it profitable to prey upon the credulity and avarice of their fellow men. Those who in

\* Read before the New York Section of the American Chemical Society, October 1, 1897.